
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Is yours a Name or a Nickname?[1]

'A new name.'—Rev 2[17].

So some of us aren't always going to be called what we are called now, are going to get a new name. But won't that be a bit puzzling? A name is a kind of label they stick on us that they may know us again, as on that day you came home from holidays when there was such a crush down at the station, and everybody was shouting for a porter, Dad picked your luggage out of the heap of it that they kept throwing out from the van, knew it at once because it had his name tied to each bit of it. 'That's mine,' he said, 'and that, and that, and that.' And he was right every time. Or a name is a sound to which we learn to answer, knowing that it means me; just as when you call 'Felix, Felix,' your black cat opens his eyes, and, when he sees there is no fish, closes them again; but he knew what you meant. So when you are out playing with the other fellows, and Mother comes and calls 'Tommie, Tommie,' 'Bother!' you say, 'that's me. Sorry, you chaps, I have to cut off home; they're wanting me.' You know the sound that stands for you. But suppose Mother called 'Peter, Peter,' you would take no notice, would keep on playing, and then all of a sudden you would remember. 'Oh, I forgot, they've changed my name; I amn't Tommie any longer; when they call Peter nowadays that's me,' and off you would run. But it would be very puzzling, don't you think? as bad as eight times any day!

But in the old days names weren't just sounds, they were given because they fitted. Sometimes they were nicknames, really. And nicknames have to fit, else they won't stick. There's a chap in your class called Tubby. Why? Because, of course, he is a bit stout; or Shadow, because there is hardly any of him; or Ginger, because he has a temper. Or there's a girl you know called Twopence, because she is smaller even than a threepenny bit. The names are given because they match the persons. Well, many names were once like that. I suppose one of my people long ago talked far too much, and so I am called Gossip. And a boy in the Old Testament was always laughing and joking and singing and making fun, and so, because he was so sunny, they called him Sunny.

And other names were really prayers. Long after you are fast asleep your Mother kneels down every night and prays for you, prays that you may be clean and straight and true. And long ago mothers and fathers used to put their prayers and hopes and longings for their boys and girls into the names they gave them. 'Make them this, or this, or this,' they said, whatever they most wanted for them; and they put it all into the name they chose for them.

Or sometimes, if a laddie wasn't getting on well, they would change his name and call him something else, hoping that with a new name he might make a new start, as you do in a new class or with a new exercise book; that the old rowdy would become kinder and gentler, and the selfish little lass begin to think of others; that with the new name they might become other persons, better and nicer than they used to be. They tried that once in Scotland. There was a clan called Mactavish that kept causing endless bother. Always on dark nights they kept raiding people's lands, and burning their farms, and making off with their cattle, till at last the king got tired of it. 'These Mactavishes,' he said, 'are just a nuisance. There isn't going to be any more of them. From to-day they are to call themselves Thomson, and be done with their old ways.' And so Thomson they became. But it made no difference. The farms were still burned, when the moon was hidden, and the cattle were still taken. Now, indeed, it was Thomsons that kept doing it, but it was the same old people all the same. For you might call them what you like, but they were still Mactavishes inside. And so you may think, 'A new name, what is the good of that to me? For I shall be the same me. That's a silly plan—is not a bit of use.' Ah! but sometimes names were changed because they no longer fitted, and that is why the new name here is given. What's the use of calling a girl Twopence when she has grown up big and tall and handsome? Or why keep up the old name Ginger if the boy has now no temper at all, is as good humoured as can be? There is no meaning in it any longer. For he isn't Ginger, and you must get him a new name to suit what he is now. And that is what is promised here. You know your name calls up a picture—everybody's

[1] By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

does. When we hear it, we see you. And what is it that we see? Oh, a dear wee lass, and a merry-hearted little laddie. And yet there are some things in the picture not so nice. 'Maggie's been here,' says Mother. However does she know? Why, because the back of the chair is jammy, or the door handle syrupy, or the carpet all lumps of mud. And Maggie always forgets to wash her hands and to rub her boots when she comes in. And that's part of the picture that her name calls up. Or a tremendous row breaks out; all at once there is squabbling and roaring and crying where there had been quietness and peace. 'There's Tommie home,' says Mother, without stopping reading. Tommie has a way of making trouble. That's part of the picture that his name calls up. But suppose Tommie grows quite different, and Maggie learns to wash her hands, the old name will call up the wrong picture now and be unfair. We must get a new one that fits them, not as they used to be, but as they are now. You see? Well, what God tells us here is that though you may have heaps of things in you that aren't one bit what you know they should be; though your name may call up a very tousley, angry little person with hot cheeks and quick fists; or a selfish little soul, grabby and greedy; or a sulky wee body who can't get up and laugh and play on happily though it was really sore; and though it seems no use to try to be anything else, still, if we do try, and if we let Him help us, by and by the sulks and the temper and the selfishness will go, and they will need to give us a new name because we shall be a new person, far nicer, and far better, and far, far more lovable, not sulky, and not angry, and not selfish any more.

'Follow it Up!'[1]

'He also that is slack in his work
Is brother to him that is a destroyer.'—Pr 18[9].

I was greatly interested the other day in a cry I heard at a football match, for sometimes it is nearly as interesting to listen to a match as to watch one. One of the boys—yes, it was a school match—was playing a very strange game. Perhaps his teacher had been saying specially straight things to him and he couldn't get them out of his mind, or this was one of the 'off' days which will come along from time to time. Anyhow, he seemed to have forgotten that he belonged to a team, and that the team's business was to score as many clean goals as possible, for whenever the ball came his way he was like somebody who had just awakened from sleep, and he looked as if he were saying, 'Dear me, here's the ball—whatever must I do with it?' Then he would make rather silly rushes nowhere in particular. Three or four times he got the ball, played about with it, and then lost it, until my neighbour could stand it no longer and began to shout so loudly that others took up the cry, and soon all over the field we could hear the shout, 'Follow it up! Why don't you follow it up? Follow it up!' That cry 'Follow it up!' seemed good sense in football, and it is equally good sense in the splendid game we call 'life.' That game also can so easily be spoiled when we forget this rule.

Last winter, for example, a young fellow said, 'I'm not going to waste time now that I have left school. I'll learn French properly.' That was a good start anyhow. His father thought so, and bought him the books, which is one of the things fathers are for. Towards Christmas he stopped his studies—there were parties to go to then. The irregular verbs got a long, long rest, and in March he was saying, 'I'll drop French now and learn German next winter.' What a pity there was nobody near to shout 'Follow it up!' That way lies bad sport and a poor life.

If you read that wonderful book *The Pilgrim's Progress* you will find there two stories: one about those who followed up their great adventure, and those who didn't. Have you noticed how Bunyan emphasizes that, underlining it over and over, how all the way they are met by folk returning?

This wonderful Book of Proverbs with its big stores of practical wisdom has a very plain word to say about those who live their lives after this fashion—the slacker is brother to the destroyer. Perhaps we didn't think it was as serious as that—probably we even thought it didn't matter very much. Yet surely that player was destroying some of the efficiency of his team, wasn't he? This sort of person is a destroyer wherever you find him—in teams, in clubs, in schools, or in churches. The folk who try deliberately to destroy them don't hurt them very much as a rule, but when this dreadful brother of the destroyer gets into them the serious mischief begins. This, then, is one of our biggest fights—to keep ourselves up to the standard of our duty, whatever that duty may happen to be. We must watch those powers within that would thrust us out of the fight—our tiredness, our laziness,

[1] By the Reverend R. Strong, M.A., B.Litt., Norwich.

and our disappointment. Here is a thrilling motto to finish with. You will find it in one of the Poet Laureate's poems, 'Fight to be found fighting.'

The Christian Year.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

The Sorrow of the Divine.

'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not.'—Is 53^3.

There is scarcely a verse of Scripture that we feel to be more akin to our thought of the human Jesus than this. It has been set to music which has developed the poignancy and the pathos of it; and the words and the music together have so wrapped themselves in our minds that the verse has become almost to us a lengthened name for Christ. 'The Man of Sorrows,' 'the despised and rejected of men,' have passed into our common speech as seemly, reverent names for the Son of God.

But think of what that means. When old religions portrayed gods or the sons of gods, happiness was the chief note of the portrayal. But when the Son of God does, in actual fact, come upon the earth, He who should be the most radiant of all is the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief. What drearier light could be thrown upon the condition of the world into which He came? It is true that in the deeps of Jesus' heart there was a great calm. And that calm, that restfulness, pervaded all His consciousness, when His mind was turned solely to His Father. But when His mind was focused upon the men He loved and would have saved, then, at times, waves akin to desolation came over His Spirit. It is we and our fellows who have turned the serene Son of God into the Man of Grief.

The truth is simply this, that Jesus was the Man of Sorrows because He was the Son of God. His grief was the penalty of His greatness in such a world as this.

1. It was, in the first place, *the penalty of His purity*. Now and then it happens to us to come across one of God's good men or one of His good women, and we may notice this about them—that the evil and the base positively hurt them. That emotion relates itself to grief in this way. When such a man sees evil, by itself, as it were, he suffers; when he sees living men and women delighting in it, he sorrows. Jesus and those who follow Him are not mere moral æsthetes. In good men there is always a sense of brotherhood, and a 'social sorrow' develops when those who are bound up with them in the bundle of life are delighting in the hateful to God. The purer the eyes, the sharper the pain; the sharper the pain, the deeper and more honest the grief. When it is such an one as Jesus that is concerned, how shall sinful human hearts, even the most pure of them, understand the sadness that held Him? All that we can say is—for we have no stronger words—'He was acquainted with grief'!

2. In the second place, His sorrow was *the penalty of His enthusiasm*. Jesus was a man of a great passion. He passionately believed in the Kingdom of God; He passionately appealed to men to hear and to enter. His kingdom would come indeed, but not for those to whom He spoke unless they listened then. The passing of time meant everything to His hearers. Save they hearkened and responded, their day would pass. None of us can read the teaching of Jesus and fail to notice the urgency that marked many of His utterances. It is an aspect of His work that we are prone to neglect, but it is not well for us to neglect it.

It is not needful to press the thought that a man's sole chance of rightness with God may pass with a single, light-hearted moment of carelessness and heedlessness; although it is not a thought which we can light-heartedly reject. There are facts queerly stern in life; and we can say that some men seem curiously to have settled into a spiritually petrified state, although they were open enough to spiritual influences once.

But there is sufficient ground for urgency apart from that great, dread possibility. There is the urgency of the loss of the best, and of the absolute finality of the loss of to-day.

There is one great sternness in life, which we should all do well to face, that, however many new chances, opportunities, God may give us, *this* chance, *this* opportunity, never comes back; and that the loss of it colours all our future possibilities and chances. The neglects of the past determine, so far, the possibilities of the future. We all, in greater or less degree, here at any rate, because of our own silly neglect of God's call, have to be content with God's second-best.

Now, Jesus knew that well. Wherefore, He pleaded passionately with men. Clear and strong rang out His 'verily, verily': grave and arresting

came His 'he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' And did men hear, think you? One or two, and a woman here and there. But the multitude went heedless on their way, letting each day place a new gravestone over another might-have-been. And still more earnestly He pleaded, till, at the end, you remember, they met Him with jeers.

3. In the third place, His grief was *the penalty of love*. Conceive the case of a father who watches his child debasing himself, refusing the best, refusing the aid of all the sacrifice—and what stint would there be to it?—that the father would give to save that child's soul alive. The thing happens. No greater grief comes to a good man. It comes solely because he is good and because he loves. After such manner was the experience of Jesus. He really did love men. I think He was the only one who ever lived who could be truly said to be possessed with a love of humanity. And the plain fact was that 'He was despised and rejected of men. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.' Ah! I think Jesus could have borne that, if only men had turned to righteousness. He would have been content to go out alone, unknown and to be forgotten, if only His word had been heard, and men had lived on it, responding to its call. But His rejection was the rejection of His message: and that cut Him, broke His heart, because He cared enough for men to die for them.[1]

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Simplicity of the Gospel.

'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.'—2 Co 5^{19}.

1. *The difficulty of being simple.* To be simple is thought to be easy, and to understand simplicity easier still. But few judgments are more superficial. To rid himself of artificiality and complexity is among man's last and highest achievements.

A French philosopher speaks of life as working simply like an artist drawing a picture with one stroke of his pencil, while our mechanical understanding of it is like a child imitating his line with a multitude of little squares. The skill to make that one adequate stroke, or even the sense for its simple perfection, is in every sphere high and difficult, but in no sphere more than in religion. Nor anywhere else does failure impose as burdensome complexity.

[1] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 85.

Some learned persons even think that religion began with simplicity, and that, if only we could work back to primitive religion, we should recover religion's simple essence. But such traces as we can discover tend to show that the primitive, so far from being simple, was an amazing confusion of complicated beliefs and detailed observances. The great prophetic minds alone have achieved simplicity, and no one has perfectly attained it except the Greatest. He reduces it to good news of the Father to His children.

2. *The simplicity of the good news.* The Apostle's statement in our text is his own understanding of this good news of Jesus; and it, too, is simple when we rid ourselves of the elaborations which have been woven into it till it has ceased to be a gospel and become a system of theology, a code of Divine legislation. To rediscover its simplicity we must banish from our minds every thought about it except that it is just good news of God and nothing else. For Paul a ministry of reconciliation was the sun-kissed slopes of Olivet, near and friendly in the pure air; for his interpreters it has too often been the precipices of Sinai, wrapped in a thick cloud of dogma which echoes with the heavy rumbling of controversy. The words which to the Apostle were plain everyday speech have become remote and elaborate and technical. 'God was in Christ' to him meant simply the felt presence of the Father in One who was perfectly His Son; to his interpreters it is a complex and mysterious doctrine of Christ's person. 'Reconciling the world,' which was simply turning men from enemies into friends, is expounded by perplexing controversies about prevenient grace. 'Not imputing trespasses,' which was simply the pardon which restores to fellowship in spite of offences, is turned into difficult and forbidding theories of justification. The result has been to change the simple gospel that God is a Father, just because there is no limit to His love's endeavour to restore us to our place as His children, into a plan of salvation which stands like a frowning precipice between us and God.

The gospel simplifies religion to faith in the Father and the service of love to His children. God, for the prophets, was not housed in temples or fed by sacrifices or honoured by solemnities, but 'looked to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at His word'—a word concerned only with doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with our God. But, as never in the world

before or since, the gospel was simplified by Jesus. God is the Father whose highest perfection appears in kindness to the unthankful and evil: and, because He is love, we can serve Him only through His children and especially by His own perfection of loving those who hate us. Worship of God who is Spirit requires only spirit and truth. God's service was the common life: and traditions of the dead past were set aside as making void God's word in life, and purifications as the wrong way of cleansing life, and regulations as the wrong way of directing life.

3. But after Jesus, and because of Jesus, the gospel was turned into a yet vaster and more complicated system of law than ever existed after the prophets. The Church replaced the nation with claims which made God even more exclusive; sacraments replaced sacrifices and were even more sacerdotal; a more mysterious traditional belief was imposed by a greater external authority; a more elaborate ritual was made valid by a more exacting priestly succession; regulation penetrated deeper into life by means of a vastly more intrusive system of confession and casuistry.

Why did this happen? If the gospel is so simple, why was it so laboriously elaborated into law? The reason is just the reason of the artificial limb. When the simplicity of life from within fails us, we must do the best we can with the laboured complexity of mechanism from without. Religion has the same function for the soul as limbs for the body, for the soul is active and progressive only as it has something sacred to reverence and obey. Some form of faith, therefore, it must have; and, if it have not one which arises simply from our vision of the truth, the higher our need, the more elaboration will be necessary to supply a substitute from without. As the hand needs a more complex artifice than the foot, a higher gospel needs a more complex law to do its work.

The difference between simplicity and elaboration is a question of order. If you begin with God, you quite simply have the gospel, just as, if you begin with life, you quite simply have the use of your hand.

4. But if the gospel is thus simple, *why is it not as easy as it is simple*, easy to present and easy to understand? Why should the life of His ambassadors be an unbroken record of bitter opposition and persecution and martyrdom? Why, in particular, should Jesus need to be a man of sorrows and commend God's love specially by a death of shame and agony? And why, above all, when they have endured and all this testimony has been borne, is the simple freedom of the gospel turned into the complicated slavery of the Law?

The gospel of reconciliation is simple as the prodigal coming to himself and going home and finding pardon showered upon him in every token of love. But it is not simpler. The prodigal must come to himself and go home every step of the way and find there the same Father and the same life he fled from, and discover in them freedom and peace and blessedness. However warm his welcome, this requires nothing less than that he who was dead should be alive again. It is simple as life, simple as love. There are no simpler things in the world, but so far are they from being easy that God alone can be their source: and even He can give them only as in spending His life He manifests His love. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to Him in His holiness and all it appoints for us and all it requires of us. God beseeches us to be reconciled to Him, but it is to Him as He is, for in nothing less can we be truly blessed.

Yes, simple as it is, it is not easy, else there had been no Cross. Its demands are not small. The heaviest requirements of law are finite; every requirement of love is infinite and leaves us, after we have done our utmost, still unprofitable. But it makes no demand without its own succour. Nor does it ask obedience except in its own freedom. If the yoke is not easy and light, as lightness and ease are reckoned in the far country, it is so by the strength and joy which come from knowing that all things are of God who reconciles us to Himself through Jesus Christ, with whom we are heirs of God who makes all things ours both for the highest uses of time and the surest hopes of eternity, and whose blessing makes rich and adds no sorrow.[1]

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Eagle Spirit.

A STUDY OF ST. JOHN.

Raphael painted a portrait of St. John. He showed the best-beloved of the Apostles as one with a face like a woman's face, but seated on the back of an eagle soaring. Most people retain that womanly face in the thought they have of John, but the eagle has taken flight from the image they

[1] J. Oman, *The Paradox of the World*, 126.

form of him. We tend to think of John as the youthful devotee who lay with his head on the breast of Jesus at the Holy Supper. There we leave him, forgetting that he alighted there with an eagle's wings, and that he arose thence on an eagle's pinions which carry us up nearer heaven than any others do in the whole heavenward flight of the New Testament.

You touch the height to which a man can grow, when you catch some look of a woman in his face, and the poise and movement of an eagle in his soul. It is this union and blending you see in Milton, in Dante, in Newman, in Keble, in Alexander Whyte. These all belong to the breed of St. John. In their youth it is the eagle that predominates; as life goes on, the qualities of the dove shine through more and more. So it was with St. John. Don't forget that he, too, like his brother James, was called Boanerges, 'Thunderson.' He, too, it was who said to Jesus, 'Did you ever hear the like, sir! We found a man casting out devils in your name; but we dealt with him!' He did—with a stroke of his curved beak! He, too, it was who cried against the Samaritan village, 'Fire from heaven, Lord; burn them up!'—lightning from his talons, like the lightning from the talons of Jove's eagle! He, too, it was who came with his mother Salome to beg a royal seat at the side of Christ's throne. Here was an eagle who wanted to play the part of one of Rome's imperial birds.

It was this fierce and ruffling youth that Jesus halloed to Himself, took and set upon His wrist, and trained as a falcon of the love of God. Note the adventurous courage Jesus showed in the choice of His Apostles. He chose eagles, any one of which might have turned vulture against Him, as indeed one of them did. But He took the risk, and in eleven cases out of twelve the choice was justified. No man, however kingly his spirit may be, however adventurous, or ambitious, or full of the zest of wide spaces and the liberties of life, need be afraid that, if he comes to Christ, he will be cabined like an eagle mewed in a cage, or have his wings clipped. It is time that certain people to-day were brought to see that conversion to Christ does not turn an eagle into a barnyard fowl. It may mean, it does mean, recognizing that the barnyard fowl counts as much in the eyes of God as the eagle counts, and must be treated as such. But when a man finds the nest of his soul in allegiance to Christ, the boundaries of life are enlarged beyond all former vision, and life offers a field for adventure beyond all former surveys.

So St. John found it. True, the vulture elements that stirred in his youthful soul were tamed. That spirit of intolerance, and that spirit of jealousy towards others, and that mood of worldly self-glorification, were trimmed and transformed. But with these beaten down beneath his feet, John was so lightened in soul that, as an eagle, he soared into adventures such as none other of the children of men has known. Though they chained him to a rock on the Isle of Patmos, he beat about heaven with his wings, and circled about the very throne of God.

1. Let us see, first, that St. John had *the talons of an eagle.* You have heard of that mighty bird's tenacious claws; now, you must readily detect this quality of tenacity and endurance in St. John. Do you not know that he was the most steadfast of the disciples, in the Trial scenes, at the foot of the Cross, abiding with Christ to the last? Pray to the King of Saints that you may be steadfast and enduring, as was this eagle spirit John! Do you ever think that Christ has deserted you? Most of us have betimes such black days, when our Lord seems dead and buried. Make John the centre of your desolation, as did the disciples long ago, and let the infection of his hope touch your soul. Has your loyalty to Christ, in your life out there in the world, sent you into exile? Remember John's endurance on Patmos, and be brave! And there are others to whom I would commend John's steadfastness. There are young people who, when they first took the Holy Supper of their Lord, were as those who leaned upon His very breast, so sincere was their devotion. But the days and the months pass by, and the glow of devotion fades, and the fervent vows wear thin and tear to pieces, and what is there now to distinguish them from those to whom Christ and His Kingdom are as a fairy-tale? Remember John, who so fled from his allegiance and protesting vows, but came back to Christ with drooping wings; pluck a quill therefrom, and write upon your heart, though it need blood to write it, 'Christ have mercy upon me, and make me strong and steadfast to endure!'

2. John had also *the eyes of an eagle.* No eyes see so far as the eyes of that kingly bird: and such eyes had John. He saw the Son of God in a poor peasant standing on the shore and calling out to the boat, 'Have you any meat?' He saw angels in a grave, where others saw only the vacancy of death. He saw a City of God ready to descend from God in

heaven upon a world where others saw nothing but bloodshed. Sometimes, in our worship, we join the children in their hymn, and pray, 'O give me Samuel's ear and heart and mind!' Make this your canticle and prayer to-day, 'Give me the vision of St. John!' Do we need anything more urgently in the world to-day than the eye to see in every human face the emergent face of the Son of God, and behind all ragged shapes His form?

3. In the third place, we would return to the image we formed of St. John, and suggest that he had *the wings of an eagle*. If we read the Gospel of St. John with this image of a soaring eagle above the page we will agree that it is an exact and fruitful metaphor. In those first fourteen verses of the Gospel's opening chapter we see the spirit of St. John hovering in the white altitudes of heavenly thought, poised in brooding reflections, like an eagle on motionless wings, within the high glory of the Divine mind. Then in the fifteenth verse, with abrupt and flashing descent, he swoops to earth and circles about the head of John the Baptist. And then begins a series of august spirals in the Gospel narrative, through which the Evangelist moves in widening and climbing circles, until, in the wonderful chapters at the end of the book, he rises again to the empyrean, and, passing to the book called *The Revelation*, makes his nest in the altar and throne of the heavenly Jerusalem. . . . Is there any figure of speech that can so nearly describe these mighty movements as the one which tradition has attached to St. John—the gospeller who flies on eagle's wings?

The cry to-day is more for the Epistle of St. James, simple and practical, than for the Epistles of St. Paul, profound and philosophical, more for St. Mark, straightforward and concrete, than for St. John, mystical and ethereal. Now there is much to be said for this demand. We do want religion to be simple, practical, straightforward, and concrete. But don't forget that our religion has elements in it which reach to the uttermost stretch of human thought; it has depths in it, in which the soul is swallowed up in unutterable surrenders of piety to the soul of God. Certainly we have the right to demand that religion have, as its outcome, simple godliness and straightforward practical work and service. But we cannot have these outcomes unless there are men and women like Augustine and Christina Rossetti who, by their wings of lofty thought and piety, keep the skies clear, so that the dew of refreshing may form on the ground. We cannot keep going as busy doers of what is called practical religion, unless we keep returning from time to time to the deep wells of cloistered devotion, and to the heavenly heights of thought, of which those eagle-spirits are the priests and guardians. We cannot keep going in our Christian service, even although we observe every verse of the Epistle of St. James every day, unless we keep on steeping our minds and souls in the Gospel of St. John. Our life as Christians will become dry, drooping, and lustreless, unless we *practise* pious retirements. This age is very little given to quiet and serious thought, or to turning aside to devotional refreshments. Which of us can say, 'Last week, for a quarter of an hour on end, I unfolded my soul to Christ in prayer'? If you cannot meet such a question as this, do not be surprised if you are feeling that the passage of life is leaving a sense of vacancy in your heart, or if you feel that it is becoming a dry and comfortless thing trying to be good and to do good! You want a change of air. You need to spread out your wings and go up with St. John for a time. You need to nest your soul where he nested his, about the altar and throne of God and the Lamb. You need seasons in which to think out God, and to pray God into your soul!

Do not go off with the idea that St. John spent his days and nights in an eagle's eyrie of contemplation and mystical communion, to the forgetting of the plain domestic obligations of this workaday world! This eagle spirit was the homeliest of men and the most practical of citizens. The last picture we have of him in his old age is that of a fatherly soul with little children about his chair; of a lover of animals who kept a pheasant as his pet; of a rescuer and redeemer of young men who had turned to highway robbery, lurking in the mountains beyond Ephesus, and defying the appeals and policing of all the shrewd, practical men of the town. There was nothing in this great Christian philosopher with his ethereal piety that detached him from the domestic ways and the common interests of life, or from the business of a social worker. And this came about because this eagle spirit lived all the time too close to that Lord of his, who likened Himself to a barnyard hen, and His people to her chickens, to turn a contemptuous or negligent eye on the busy affairs of the homely farm of everyday life.[1]

[1] A. B. Scott, *The Twelve Take Stock of Us*, 130.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

The Nearness of Faith.

'The word is nigh thee.'—Dt 30^{14}, Ro 10^{8}.

St. Paul does not quote the passage in Deuteronomy with strict accuracy; and he makes so strange a use of it that it would need a separate sermon to examine that alone. Yet the general idea of both passages is clear. It is that God lays on man no impossible task; religion and morality are not so hidden that they cannot be known, or so inaccessible that they cannot be reached. The things necessary for life and salvation are to be found in the familiar round of life, in our very selves: 'the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.'

In all ages humanity has conceived religion as a great mystery to be discovered only by searching heaven and earth. Moses found that idea in his day. We find it as surely in ours.

It takes three great forms among ourselves. At the one extreme we have the superstitious form, Spiritualism. Not satisfied with the revelation God has given us in Scripture, some think they can themselves discover a better revelation. Let any sane man, however, compare the revelations thus gained with that word of Scripture which is nigh us, even in mouth and heart, and decide which is the more valuable towards right living.

Now turn to the scientific form. The science of our day virtually says that the word is not nigh us. It raises doubt about every question, moral and religious. It declares that we must search heaven and earth before we can be sure of anything. It returns from its own search, and says, 'If there be a God, we have not found him in the heavens above or on the earth beneath.' Thus, with all its great services to mankind, science makes religion hard and inaccessible to many.

Is religion, then, a hard, distant, inaccessible thing? The spiritualist says we must wait till a path is discovered between this world and the next; the scientist, till science has explored heaven and earth; the student of comparative religion, till all religions are examined and compared; the theologian, till we assent to the mysteries of doctrine; the higher critic, till he has settled all problems of authorship, dates, texts, and so forth.

Is it credible that God has made the great things of religion and morality so desperately hard to know? We still believe that Moses is right when he declares: 'This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard (wonderful) for thee, neither is it far off. . . . But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.' We do not need to wait till all questions in heaven and earth are solved before we begin to live aright.

1. To begin with, the word of God is *so nigh that it is in our own hearts.* We draw a distinction between natural and revealed religion. Nevertheless, the great fundamental truths of revealed religion are also those of natural religion. God in the Bible does not approach us with a set of truths and commands entirely foreign to your nature and mine. They are already in our hearts; some sense of right and wrong responds to them; the soul within us is made on the same plan. Take the two commandments which our Lord singled out as those on which hang all the Law and the Prophets: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind . . . and thy neighbour as thyself': is there not something in the human heart which recognizes these as right and reasonable? We may indeed *argue* ourselves into thinking that no God exists: but far beneath all argument there lives in every human soul something which says, 'God is, and God is good and worthy to be loved.'

2. Once more, it is *nigh us by the very construction of our daily life,* 'that we may do it.' For, however perplexing the intellectual problems of our day may be, the great circle of human experience remains the same in all ages—the common joys and sorrows, love and friendship, daily work, helpfulness to those who need our help. These things are not far off—the word of daily duty is very nigh us, in the work to which we rise morning by morning, in the duties to our fellows which living with them inevitably brings. 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

3. And it is *nigh us in this also—that all that is necessary for obedience is faith.* St. Paul in Romans says that 'the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise.'

Now faith in Christ is to some a word by no means nigh them, and this because they quite misunderstand what faith is. They think it means a clear mental understanding of the great doctrines which gather round Christ: the Incarnation—the union

in Him of humanity and divinity—the Trinity—the meaning of His death and resurrection. But faith is not clear knowledge, but trust. Here is a child just beginning to think. His little mind is greatly puzzled about his father—he does not understand why he goes to business, or what business is, or where it is. Imagine the child saying, 'I can have no faith in my father until I understand all his life; I cannot trust him until I clear up to my own mind those things in his conduct which perplex me.'

No child is so foolish as that; yet grown men say precisely this about Christ—we cannot trust Him until we understand Him completely.

When we demand the solution of all problems before we will believe, too often the real reason is some moral unwillingness to be convinced. Faith is no such hard task as we make out—it is the virtue of all humble and childlike souls, who trust goodness when they see it. And just because faith is not the conquering of all mysteries, because it is the quiet trust of a child believing where it cannot know, therefore 'the word is nigh thee even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.' Everything of real value is very near to us—in those moral and religious instincts which are inborn in every human soul, in those familiar duties which lie at our feet, in that simple faith, that clinging trust in Christ, which is possible to every childlike heart.[1]

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

The Power of Weakness.

'If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern my weakness.'—2 Co 11[30] (R.V.).

St. Paul is fearing lest the Corinthian converts, his dear children in Christ, dear almost especially, as many children are, because of their waywardness, should fall back from the high standard that has been set them. And therefore he writes them a letter, a very personal letter, full, as we say, of himself, of his own life, struggles, work, his own services to them in the past, his own claim on them now. And he is careful to show that he does not forget their difficulties. He sees how very hard it is for them to stand upright in the gospel of God. And then he begins to emphasize, to dwell upon, the fact—the fact as he has found it in his own experience—that the greatest gifts that have come to him, the greatest blessings from God, the greatest successes in his wonderful work, have come in and through weakness.

1. *The astonishing paradox.* St. Paul is one of the very few men, every one must admit, who have exercised a real influence on the whole current of the world's history. There are some scholars who would set down almost the whole of Christ's teaching, as we have it now, to him. There are many who still discuss and dissect his writings to find in them a system, a Paulinism, which shall be set beside the great philosophies of ancient and modern times. And there can be no doubt at all that, system or no system, what he taught, as he taught it, has had far more influence on the world than any of the philosophies. It certainly does sound strange that such a man, when he looks back upon his life, for the purpose of helping others by his experience, should find the best part of it all to lie in his weaknesses.

It is not at all what we should expect. It is not what we find in the opinions of other great men. Who can imagine the great Napoleon, or Bismarck, the creator of modern Germany—why, they would not have acknowledged that they had any weakness; who can imagine Darwin, almost the greatest of all men of science saying quite that—that the weaknesses in his life were the things he most gloried in? No, most great men, most good men even, would say that their glory came when they saw something that ought to be done and had strength to do it.

2. *Why does St. Paul glory in the things that belong to his weakness?* His weakness, his physical 'thorn in the flesh,' the messenger of Satan as he calls it, his continual suffering, labour, peril, apparent failure, the greatness of his task so heroically undertaken and seemingly rewarded with such infinitesimal success—why does he glory in them?

Not, we imagine, in themselves. He does not say that, like some of the mediæval ascetics or the ancient monks and hermits, he thought pain, illness, and hunger, others' treachery, his own failure, in themselves good—that he rejoiced and gloried in them as they were. He was quite ready to avoid them if that did not mean giving up the great object of his life—the effective preaching of Jesus Christ. But he gloried in his weakness, surely, because of the use, when it came to him in its different forms, he put it to. It is because all these things—poverty, distress, failure, sickness—throw the soul back upon God; they all 'demand and cry out for faith in God.' It is not that man in weakness really needs God more than in health and

[1] J. S. Carroll, *The Motherhood of God*, 100.

strength, but that he knows better that he needs, that he is thrown back upon, the ultimate realities, the spiritual and the eternal. And the man or woman who will feel this most profoundly is the man or woman who has suffered most.

With everything that St. Paul lost—his ambition, his friends, and last of all the Church—there was the mutual assurance in persecution, the mutual joy and happiness in the communion of the Lord. And then those, too, are taken, and he is left in prison, chained day and night to a soldier guard. Surely no man ever lost more. To no man could the weakness that he spoke of mean more real, more heart-searching deprivation.

But then it came—it was coming more fully with each thing that he lost—the glorious vision of what God really is, and man in Him.

Every time of solitude, deprivation, friendlessness, has an enormous strength to give. We should win from it larger, truer ideas of what the world is, our fellow-men, ourselves, God. That was the strength that came to men like Hannington, imprisoned by savages, stricken with fever, and called out to be murdered while the ink was still wet on the page where he had written that he was held up by that thirtieth psalm, 'Therefore shall every good man sing of thy praise without ceasing: O my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever': the strength that is seen in the last words of Gordon to his sister, when it was too late for rescue—'God rules all. I am quite happy, thank God.' And, like Lawrence—'I have tried to do my duty.' It is the time of weakness that makes the hero and the saint.

The deepest lesson of weakness comes from the Cross. If you feel that you are losing your sense of the nearness of God, that, when the things you have been brought up to believe in are questioned, denied, mocked at, you have no answer ready because the questionings have eaten into your own heart; even if you feel as if the love of God was failing you because you cannot tell if there be a God at all, then remember the things that you do know—that 'to be brave and true and pure is better than to be cowardly and false and foul.' You do know that right is right, that the serious work, the happy companionship, the unselfish sympathy with others who perhaps are *not* strong, not industrious, not happy, do bring their own reward. Your time of weakness—for weakness it is to be, for the time, bereft of God—may bring you to see clearly what is real goodness, real work, real duty—what lies behind all these overlaying cares of our beset and hurried life. Only let your true desires be set on character, duty, goodness, and God will bring you to them, through the weak things that are temporal, to the things of power that are eternal. That is the lesson of the Cross. It was a great victory. Weakness, failure, desertion; so it seems. But not one word from the Lord, of blame of others; not one word that does not mean love, and patience, and forgiveness, and trust: those are the greatest things in the world, because they are the links between us and God; they are the strongest, because they cast the soul simply and entirely on our Father which is in heaven.[1]

[1] W. H. Hutton, *A Disciple's Religion*, 217.

Poverty in the Old Testament.

By Professor John E. McFadyen, D.D., United Free Church College, Glasgow.

The economic aspect of ancient Israel's life has not been very extensively considered by British or American scholars. Brief but suggestive discussions may be found in Orello Cone, *Rich and Poor in the New Testament*; Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*; Keeble, *The Social Teaching of the Bible*; and Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*. The subject is more fully treated by Sir George Adam Smith in the first volume of his *Jerusalem*, and by C. Ryder Smith in *The Bible Doctrine of Society* and *The Bible Doctrine of Wealth and Work*. In French the most elaborate of recent discussions is *Les 'Pauvres' d'Israel* by the Strasbourg professor, A. Causse; in German the subject has been treated frequently—by Buhl, Herrmann, Kleinert, Köberle, Löhr, Nowack, Walter, Weber, Wilke, and others. One aspect of the subject [1] has been recently presented

[1] *Die Beurteilung der Armut im Alten Testament* (Verlag Friedrich Andreas Perthes, Gotha, Stuttgart).